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REGIONAL TRADE AND FOOD SECURITY

JRL Kotsokoane

Past Minister of Agriculture of Lesotho - Dinner speech at the conference

We all agree on the need for cooperation at all levels of society - local, regional and national inside a single country, as well as internationally. In fact, mutual assistance starts in the home between husband and wife, and between children and parents. Considering the many and varied aspects and ramifications of the conference theme, and with a view to further agitating your minds, I shall confine my remarks to a few salient issues arising from presented papers and ensuring discussions.

Collectively and severally, the countries of Southern Africa are affected by global economic trends. Like marriage, our economic interaction with the rest of the world is for better or worse, but, unlike marriage, there is no emergency exit. We have no choice but to adapt or die. Even the world's most powerful Communist state, the People's Republic of China, is experimenting with capitalism through the establishment of special Trade Zones. In both international and regional terms, survival is the name of the game.

Trade and Food Security in Southern Africa and elsewhere is not simply a matter of economics and statistics. For many governments, especially those of the so-called Third World, shortages of food, goods and services often spell political disaster. Hence the need to proceed cautiously in dealing with these matters which affect and are, in turn, affected by such internal and external issues as the following:

1. World trade which is dominated by the moguls in GATT and G7, whose interest do not often coincide with ours. The question of agricultural subsidies is a bone of contention between the United States and the European Economic Community. Food mountains in the EEC have an adverse effect of agricultural production and trade when such surpluses are dumped in developing countries as food aid, which is currently being used as a lever to influence political and economic decisions in recipient countries. Low commodity prices in international markets have crippled the economies of many developing countries, while the Multi-Fibre-Arrangement (MFA) restricts textile imports into Western Europe. Turmoil in the European Exchange mechanism is causing dangerous ripples in international financial markets.

We therefore have to be extremely careful in trading with the richest 20% of the world population who, according to the United Nations Development Programme, control 82,7% of the global GDP; while the poorest 20% account for only 1,4%. The IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes are a bitter medicine which sometimes kills the patients. An unfavourable international economic cli-

mate contributed to Africa's dismal performance during the last decade.

2. At their meeting in Windhoek last month, the Heads of State and Government of SADCC decided to consider the formation of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) at their next annual consultative conference. According to the communique, special attention will be given to a timetable and steps necessary to establish the community. The subject is, therefore, no longer academic - and so, in the light of you interesting and informative discussions, you should maintain your interest in the possible structures of such an organisation, and the implications for each member country. It is going to be a formidable task because of the diversity of political, economic, cultural and diplomatic relations currently existing between member countries on the one hand, and between them and South Africa on the other.

Tanzania is adhering strictly to the terms of the Harare Summit of Commonwealth Heads of State and Government, namely, no normalisation of relations until a democratically elected government is in place in South Africa. Zimbabwe is trading vigorously with South Africa, while Lesotho's economy is hardly discernible from that of her neighbour.

3. Regarding food security, I support those who emphasise household food security over national or regional generalisations which are nothing but statistical exercises designed to impress the uninitiated. Out there in the villages and towns of our respective countries, including South Africa, are thousands of people receiving far less than the absolute minimum of 2200 calories per capita per day recommended by FAO. The situation has been aggravated by the drought which has left SADCC with massive cereal import requirements of 12 million tons for the 1992/93 marketing years.
4. Issues regarding land, its acquisition and use, are at the heart of political discussions in our respective countries, with many politicians paying only lip-service to the vital role of agriculture in our economies. Serious attention needs to be given to communal land tenure and its association with chieftainship, whose continued existence is threatened by political and economic developments. Communal holdings are generally too small for viable economic production and so consolidation, with satisfactory tenurial arrangements and adequate protection, should be considered.

In the commercial sector, thought should be given to optimal farm size for different enterprises under varying ecological conditions.

This is necessitated by political pressure for land redistribution, as well as the trend towards part-time farming. Development of small-holdings should be encouraged and supported. Generally speaking, Africans are suspicious of freehold tenure, which might lead to land speculation and alienation. Lesotho has opted for long-term leases in urban areas and selected rural areas. In most of our countries, good agricultural land is being lost to other purposes because of bad planning or lack of appropriate control measures.

5. In line with the rest of Africa, our region has a low human development index which impinges adversely on economic development. Literacy rates are low, and educational and health services are not only inadequate, but of poor quality. The scope of education is narrow and restricted to academic subjects. *Curricula* are irrelevant to the needs of developing communities.

We need to develop our human capital in order to improve our productivity. This is the real

secret underlying the phenomenal success of the Pacific Rim countries - high literacy rates and emphasis on vocational and technical skills development. Apropos of health, suffice it to say "*Mens sana in corpore sano*".

6. The role of politicians is crucial during this period of transition, economic recession and drought. The days of rabble-rousing rhetoric are over. Informed leadership of the highest quality is needed - intellectual and moral integrity and courage. Leaders should be amenable to advice, and prepared to take painful decisions on such issues as violence, land, tariffs and pricing mechanisms, as well as resource allocation with an eye on progress and prosperity rather than political expediency. The objective should be maximum happiness for the maximum number of people. A tall order, but worth striving for because nobody wants to be poor.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the late Dr Simon Brand, an intelligent African who saw the future and acted accordingly with conviction and courage. He left his mark, and it behoves us to try to emulate him.